



Santa Catalina Bighorn Sheep Reintroduction Project

July 30 – August 12, 2015

BRIEFING

The following is a summary of bighorn sheep reintroduction activities on the Coronado National Forest from July 30 to August 12, 2015.

RELATED NEWS

On July 29, lightning ignited a fire high in the Santa Catalina Mountains. U.S. Forest Service officials monitored the Finger Rock Fire and allowed it to burn for the benefit of fire-adapted vegetation communities and consequently for wildlife as well. The fire burned a total of 750 acres before it was extinguished by rains on August 11. As with the recent Buster Fire, this fire will result in improved forage for bighorn sheep. These two fires are examples of the natural functioning of a fire-adapted ecosystem.

MORTALITIES

Early on the morning of Thursday, July 30, Arizona Game and Fish Department (Department) personnel received a mortality alert from GPS collar #37433, and Department personnel were sent to investigate. Later that morning, the daily VHF telemetry check of each collared sheep returned a mortality signal for the same sheep as well as another sheep (#37437). The GPS component on collar #37437 had not been functioning since April 3, 2015; therefore, the Department never received a GPS mortality alert for that animal.

The carcass of ewe #37433 was removed from the field on the morning of July 30 for necropsy by the Department's Wildlife Health Program. It appears that ewe #37433 died on Wednesday, July 29. The carcass of ewe #37437 could not be easily located due to the malfunctioning GPS component of the collar. Department research biologists were able to triangulate the approximate location of the sheep using radio telemetry. Once located on August 1, that carcass was necropsied, and samples were collected and submitted to a laboratory for disease testing.

The Department has conducted necropsies on all three of the recent mortalities and has received lab results for two of the three sheep (the first of the three was ewe #37439 whose death on July 24 was reported in the previous update). Necropsies and lab results reveal the three ewes suffered from respiratory infections resulting in pneumonia. Lab results indicate the pathogen *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* was present in the lung tissue of ewe #'s 37433 and 37437 and on one nasal swab. Further testing will confirm if additional pathogens were present.

All three of the ewes were captured in the Tonto National Forest in 2014. Ewe #'s 37437 and 37439 each had a lamb early this year, but the lambs would have been weaned and independent by now. No lamb was observed with ewe #37433 this year.

Pneumonia can have serious impacts on bighorn sheep populations, and it is possible that additional mortalities may occur in the coming months. Impacts can be particularly severe for lamb recruitment. Lambs born in the Catalinas are not collared, but the Department has been observing ewe and lamb groups over the past several months. Biologists are in the field in an attempt to determine current numbers of uncollared sheep.

Treatment for pneumonia in bighorn sheep is not an option; there is currently no effective vaccine or antibiotic. Past attempts to treat this disease in bighorn sheep have either had no effect, or efforts have had a negative impact on already compromised sheep. The Department is investigating the source of the infection.

CURRENT POPULATION STATUS

As of August 12, 2015, 37 collared sheep are known to be alive.

LINKS

For project background and previously-reported information on project events, including photos and videos, as well as meeting notes and minutes please visit www.azgfd.gov and click on "Wildlife", then "Catalina Bighorn Sheep" under the heading "Additional Wildlife Information".

Additional project information can be obtained by visiting the Arizona Game and Fish Department Facebook page at www.facebook.com/CatalinaBighorns, the Arizona Desert Bighorn Sheep Society webpage at www.adbss.org, or by visiting the Catalina Bighorn Advisory Committee webpage at www.catalinabighornrestoration.org. This update is a public document and information in it can be used for any purpose.

TO SUBSCRIBE

If you would like to receive project updates as they are published please send your email address to lidesouza@azgfd.gov.

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

The next written briefing will be provided on August 28, 2015.

CONTACT

Mark Hart is the Public Information Officer for this project and can be reached at (520) 628-5376.